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ABSTRACT

There are a number of apparent similarities between dropouts and academic achievers: both groups have been described as alienated and impulsive, and both can be difficult counselees because they reject some traditional values. This investigation focused on the behaviors and attitudes of a group of 23 male college sophomores who were academic underachievers, and a matched group of overachievers. Longitudinal interview data and test data were collected. The results supported the hypotheses that underachievers would be significantly more likely than overachievers to report and display "irresponsible" behaviors arising from impulsivity and anxiety over achievement in work situations. Cluster analyses of subjects' scores on the Omnibus Personality Inventory and Opinion, Attitude, and Interest Survey, together with interview data suggest the possibility of subgroup approach to underachievement. In addition, excerpts from the interviews illustrate the kinds of complex interactions that underachievers have with work, with teachers, and with those trying to intervene. (Author)

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DROPOUTS WITHIN COLLEGE

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Introduction In the past decade, much attention has been given to the apparent alienation of some college age youth. Studies have focused both on college activists, who usually stay within college, and on dropouts, whose solution is to leave (Friedenburg, 1969; Gould, 1969; Whitiker and Watts, 1969; Samenow, 1967, 1968). However, little attention has been paid to the alienation of another group of students, neither activists nor formal dropouts, but who share much in common with them. These students generally are described as academic underachievers. Many of them are in fact functioning as "dropouts within college", comprising a very alienated, frustrated and unhappy group within the majority student culture.

Samenow (1968), in a longitudinal study of college dropouts, described some of his subjects in terms that would fit many underachievers: Passive aggressive, disliking responsibility, avoiding tension, lacking commitment, narcissistic and impulsive. (Samenow, 1968). The present investigation focused on some of the same psychological issues in underachievers with a particular interest in the question of impulse control and the related issues of commitment and responsibility It has been a consistent finding that underachievement is related to impulse control (Lavin, 1965; Kipnis, Lane, and Berger, 1969), and that such problems in impulse control lower the likelihood of underachievers even coming to treatment or for their making use of counseling relationships if they do come (Kipnis and Resnick, 1971).

CG 008 187

There is another fascinating connection between underachievers and dropouts. Both groups raise difficult value questions concerning achievement and the meaning of work.

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Subjects

Out of a population of male sophomores in the University of Michigan's College of Literature, Science and the Arts, three groups were chosen by means of a procedure developed by Edgington (1965) and employed by Kisch (1968) on a similar Michigan sample: (a) Underachievers - subjects whose grade point averages were at least 1.29 standard deviations below the grade point average one would predict knowing their Scholastic Aptitude Test-Verbal (SAT-V) scores alone; (b) overachievers - subjects having grade point averages at least 1.29 standard deviations above their predicted ones; and (c) normal achievers - subjects whose grade point averages were within .13 standard deviations of their predicted ones.

Subjects were chosen solely from lists provided by the Office of Evaluation and Examinations and students meeting grade point averages and SAT-V requirements were solicited to take part as paid subjects. The final groups contained 23 underachievers, 22 overachievers, and 10 normal achievers, all of whose SAT-V scores were matched and ranged from 530-750. The underachievers had a mean SAT-V of 626 and a mean grade point average of 1.70 (grade point average ranging from 4.0, a perfect "A," to 1.0, a perfect "D" average); the overachievers had a mean SAT-V of 627 but a mean grade point average of 3.89; and the normal achievers had a mean of 641 and a grade point average of 2.80, respectively. The sample was kept small to make feasible the acquisition of extensive and intensive longitudinal data.

Procedures

After selection, all subjects were given a face-to-face interview that included a discussion of the purpose of the study and the ground rules. Four more interviews were held over the rest of the trimester, spaced about two weeks apart for each subject. However, the later interviews were done largely by telephone to make possible the relatively large amount of contact hours while retaining the

the essentails of intimacy. All interviews contained a core of open-ended questions about ongoing college life, academics, and social activities, as well as some rating scales. In general, the interviewer was interested in (a) how the student coped with academic tasks and stress, (b) where his major commitments were - home, school, extracurricular activities, and (c) how he evaluated his college experiences.

All interviews were performed by the experimenter and were taped and transcribed verbatim. In accordance with the expectation that the underachievers would display in the interview the kind of impulsive behavior that made them infrequent counselee's (of Kipnis & Resnick, 1971), a record was kept of their interview attendance. Toward the end of the term, all subjects were given Form F of the Omnibus Personality Inventory (OPI) (Hesit & Yonge, 1968), as well as a questionnaire that asked for demographic and other information. In addition, the university made available scores on the Opinion, Attitude, and Interest Survey (OAIS), a set of tests given to all University of Michigan undergraduates at the beginning of their freshman year (Fricke, 1963).

The analysis proceeded in steps. The first involved comparing the major achiever groups on the test and questionnaire data for mean differences. In the second step, only the underachievers and the overachievers were used. A cluster analysis using a nonmetric program of Lingoes' (1966) was performed on overachievers and underachievers separately and employed all variables of the OAIS and OPI plus high school rank, SAT-V and SAT- Mathematical and scores on tests for reading speed and reading accuracy. Finally, the interviews were examined for differences within underachievers as well as for differences between underachievers and overachievers. (For a more detailed discussion of procedures, see Lacher, 1973).

RESULTS

Comparisons between Overachievers and Underachievers

The first part of the analysis consisted of comparing overachievers and underachievers on their test scores and on certain aspects of their interviews. There were relatively few differences on the OPI and OAIS scales, for out of some 34 variables, overachievers had significantly higher high school rank, higher scores on the achiever personality scale of the OAIS, and lower scores on the impulse expression and complexity scales of the OPI. The absence of significant differences on scales related to amount of psychopathology was noteworthy - i.e., social and emotional adjustment on the OAIS and personal integration and anxiety level on the OPI. (Fore a more detailed discussion and presentation of the quantitative data, see Lacher, (1973).

From the interviews, three measures were pertinent to hypothesized tendencies of the underachievers to display the impulsive behaviors that would make them difficult to deal with in any kind of work situation: 1. Attendance at the interviews, themselves. 2. How they dealt with conflicts over academics, and 3. The amount of studying reported. The record of attendance revealed that significantly more underachievers failed to appear at interviews (or appeared so late that the interview had to be rescheduled) - 61% of the underachievers failed to come while only 27% of the overachievers behaved in this manner ($X^2 = 4.3$, corrected for discontinuity, significant of .01, 1 df).

In each interview, subjects were asked, "Right now, what is the most important thing on your mind? Place your concern using 1 = slightly important and 7 = extremely important. What are you going to do about it? Many of the subjects reported two or more concerns; but since the ranking procedure forced them to assign priorities it provided insights into the handling of conflicts over academics verses other concerns and the abilities of the different groups to sustain or initiate work they knew to be pressing. Approximately half of all subjects report-

ed some conflict between academic work and some other concern one or more times during the term. A comparison of the underachievers and overachievers revealed that when faced with such conflicts, only about 1/3 of the underachievers put academics first, while approximately 2/3 of the overachievers saw academics commanding prime attention, a significant difference. (Significant at .02, two tailed by the Fisher exact test).

In the initial interview, each subject was asked to "estimate the amount of time you put into school related activities yesterday." A simple median test on the gross estimate of work revealed that significantly more overachievers (13 overachievers verses 8 underachievers) reported hours greater than the overall median derived by combining the times of both overachievers and underachievers (x^2 = 2.47, significant at .05, one tailed, 1 df.).

The overall differences between underachievers and overachievers in regards to appointment keeping, impulsivity (from the OPI) work output and handling conflicts over academics supported the hypothesis that all underachievers would manifest general traits, related to impulse control that made them difficult clients and students (cf. Kipnis and Resnick, 1971). These characteristic behaviors comprise what might be termed an "irresponsibility syndrome". The interview data suggested it extended to all aspects of the students lives; many of the underachievers complained of chronically poor memories, reported frequent broken appointments, cut classes, and handed papers in late.

The interviews themselves give numerous examples of how the various measures of impulsivity or irresponsibility might translate themselves into the kind of behavior that could lead to distance from teachers and alienation from the achievement aspects of the university culture. Underachievers were often disposed to let things slide and to become passive or negativistic. Their repressive, escapist style appeared to be the product of a consistent way of dealing with anxiety, especially anxiety arising from academic stress. Here is an example:

S: "Well, my Econ, I have been putting exactly zero time in on it, we had an exam on it Monday, . . . a multiple choice test, . . . He lets you protest two questions, that you got wrong, and if you prove your point, I mean if you show how you conclude this answer, he gives you that point plus one more point for proving yourself right. Well, the way he worked it this time, we had the exam on Monday, Tuesday he hands back the exam, and you had the remainder of the hour to work on your protest. And well, Wednesday at 2:00 my one roommate and I and another guy signed the lease, and it was longer than I expected, and I didn't get back till about 3:30 and I didn't see much use in running back to the apartment. . . so I went back to the Econ building, and it was 15 minutes less than the hour and I tried to write a protest. So I didn't go, and I didn't go today, I guess Econ just isn't my bag. The exam wasn't that hard. I don't think I got that bad a grade on it. But I don't know, you might call it guilt feelings, but before I don't have that much initiative to go out and to go to a stupid class like that. I just don't see that I'm learning that much in it. But it isn't that difficult. It isn't that difficult at all."

It seemed as if the underachievers had particular difficulties in language classes, which is interesting in light of the movement of recent years on many campuses to eliminate the language requirement. Languages seemed to be particularly difficult for the underachievers perhaps because a language course (particularly at the beginning level) requires all those things with which such students have difficulty. It requires regular work, is difficult to deal with by cramming, is a requirement not an elective and is not "relevant". Here is an example:

I: "Why don't you like Spanish and have trouble with it?

S: First of all, my memory is very, really super bad, like I can't remember my courses or what hours they are at; part of this is selective, like I don't work at it. Like if I really wanted to, I could. I don't remember my student I.D. number, and I'm a sophomore and I just don't remember things . . . But with Spanish I just sort of resent the fact that a . . . it's not, it's not relaxed and like, . . . idealistically I would just like to acquire, speaking and all of that stuff; but when it comes to a question of grammar, memorizing vocabulary, work translations, I don't like it at all.

I: And what happens when you don't like it?

S: I have a real hard time. I have a hard time in remembering it and I don't make very much effort because I am very ungrade conscious, like I'm grade conscious just to a point where - to survive, you know in the systems requirements to get a C. Like I don't work to get B's. As a matter of fact, it so happened that last semester I had almost close to B's on the first two Spanish tests and towards the end I got a D, and it's just simply that I had a period where I just got tired of things in general and everything just fell apart."

Another underachieving student talking a different language:

"I'm the kind of person who can sit down on Friday night and go through Sunday and do mountains and mountains of work. And that is fine except when you come to a course like German where you have to slug it out every night. I just can't work like that. You know, maybe I just don't feel like working on a Wednesday night or something, so I will go to a movie or something. . . ."

Finally, the style of the underachievers, if it did not simply result in avoiding teachers in classes, could lead to very unproductive confrontations. Here is one example of a brief history of a continuing academic dispute. [redacted]. At a month into the semester:

S:"Well, there is a bad lecturer in that course, which is really a problem because there is no recitation. In most courses there is a recitation, and you can keep out of the lecture and do the readings and go to the recitations since I know what is important. It's a totally useless lecture; the lecturer is worthless. His idea of the [course content] the first hour was to ask us to draw pictures, asked us to draw four outlines of the way a theater looked in different periods, and while I really don't want to tell him his business, but if he thinks it is his business to learn it, I don't really think, well I don't really think it is my business to learn it and stuff. I mean he can teach it, but I don't want to learn that kind of stuff."

A month later:

S:"I got an E on a midterm. . . . It wasn't really a fair grade I mean usually I know about what I am going to get, and I didn't expect that. And it just wasn't really fair.

I:Why, what happened?

S:I got 35 on the objective part which wasn't too good, and it wasn't too bad. On the other part he said I just dillied and dallied around and I didn't answer the question and I had a pot pourri of blah blahs and all that histronic language. And it was, I don't know. . .like I did answer the question as well as I could, and for one thing, I don't see how anybody can tell me what a question says. Like he told me that I misunderstood the question. He can't tell me how to understand the question, he should have tried to understand how I understood it and then graded me on how well I understood it in my own way".

Two weeks later, the course involved arguments with the Dean:

S:"Things are getting a little bit worse in this class, people will absolutely refuse to let me drop it. . . I don't know whether I talked to you before about trying to drop it, but I tried to drop it, and there is all sorts of hassles. I went in and talked to Mr. _____ who is assistant Dean, I think, and it just appeared to me that he was trying to teach me responsibility by forcing me to go through that class. What he did, was

he looked through all the things on my record saying Yeh, I'm in honor's college I got a 4.9 you know whether he would say I could understand why you dropped this. This is irrelevant to what you are doing. Of course, it just seemed to me a kind of funny way that he did things. He says, this class is only an indicator of a problem on a grander scale. That is, that you were trying to settle down, and have you thought about my financial situation in the future, have I thought about graduate school, and a job, and all kinds of stuff like that, and a well it was nice of him to remind me, but what I thought was that it really wasn't any of his business what I take classes for. Like a, I don't like that class; I don't think I should be penalized for it. But it appears that I am going to be penalized for not wanting to learn all the aspects of [what he wants me to learn]. It is just sort of an unhappy situation, especially, well, today I got, today I studied for the test, and the only parts that I do any good on are the parts about the plays because I read the plays and I actually tried to learn the other stuff. It is just, I mean, this morning, I read the book, for the second time, over the part that is being tested. Usually that is enough for me. And like when I got to the class, it was really strange. . . . He gave us the thing and I just looked at it. I just couldn't answer the questions. Like, I could have answered the questions, you know? I just couldn't write anything down because it was repulsive to me. Like I could have gotten 50 or 55 points, I figured out at the end. I spent the whole time trying to figure, I spent the whole time while I was there figuring the median for my grade point. But I am going to try to talk to some kind of counselor. A student counselor. See somebody who can get me out of it. If they can't, I'm just stuck with it.

I: When did you try to drop the course?

S: I tried to drop it before midterms. But the reason I really didn't understand what it was like, was that I added it late. Because I found out real late that there wasn't,that this class that I was supposed to be in, I wasn't in. They had to switch things around or something so I said well we will see. It was just a poor choice of class."

The student quoted above really presents a rather complex problem to anyone trying to intervene. One aspect of the story is enough to demonstrate the complexity of the problem. It has to do with the mention of the fact that the student got into the course in the first place because of the cancellation of another course. Because he got in late, he had little opportunity to know the course would not be to his liking. However, knowing something about the behavior of this particular student and about underachievers in general, their tendency to be late, to be forgetful and generally irresponsible, we might wonder about whether this wasn't simply an excuse. If the student had been somewhat more alert,

kept up with notices of course changes, etc., he might have been able to choose a class he liked. The interview data gave the impression that the overachievers would never let themselves get caught that way. They were more apt to plan for all contingencies. They were also quite conscious of what effects certain behaviors might have on their grades. For instance, one overachiever reported that it was his policy to make sure he talked to a teacher at least once in the course just to let him know who he was because he was sure it might have some kind of an effect in determining his grades particularly if things were close. In a study of graduate students taking preliminary examinations at the University of Chicago, David Mechanic (1962) pointed to the problems in academic achievement that could result from a student's alienation from the social network (including faculty and other students). It is interesting to note that in the interview reports, it looked as if the overachievers behavior that I am calling "responsible" included a tendency to maintain contact with academic authorities. They usually seemed to know what was going on and they knew whom to listen to. Underachievers seem to be more out of touch. Unfortunately, there is no quantitative data for this in this investigation; and it would be worth exploring more extensively in another study.

All parties concerned must find it difficult to handle such a situation. A party not familiar to the specifics, such as a counselor or a dean, would find it difficult to know what was going on. Too often they might react with an immediate assumption that the teacher was right and the student wrong. Unfortunately, this would allow the student, whatever actually happened, to play martyr or to react to the authority of the outsider as opposed to dealing with the real issue. Furthermore, the student could use real instances of bad teaching for justifying the behavior that ends up costing him a bad grade. This student could have used someone who asked, "Given what you say about the course is true, why did you refuse to give answers you knew to be correct?"

It seemed as if the motive for this kind of game arose out of concerns about identity and autonomy. The last student quoted seriously considered an academic career, but he could not convince himself to accept working for grades in order to get into graduate school. Such students react negatively to what they feel is trivial or irrelevant and protect the concept of themselves as the honest intellectual. The problem is that a bad grade keeps you "pure" although that doesn't help future plans.

Subgroup differences

The results of the cluster analyses suggested that even though all underachievers shareed some common traits, particularly those having to do with impulse control, it was nevertheless the case that some different sorts of persons shared the same underachiever designation. Table #1 presents the results of the cluster analyses performed on the overachievers and on the underachievers separately.

TABLE 1

Summary of Cluster Differences on OAIS, OPI, and Aptitude Variables

Variables	Underachievers		Overachievers		
	U1 (n=12)	U2[a] (n=11)	O1 (n=10)	O2 (n=7)	O3[b] (n=7)
High school rank	87.2	84.2	98.2	97.4	98.0
SAT-V	595	660	615	612	655
SAT-M	655	654	709	704	655
Reading speed	49.4	70.5	62.2	76.0	62.0
Reading accuracy	46.6	70.8	61.0	59.8	74.1
OAIS					
Set True	36.5	48.8	54.8	49.8	35.1
Infrequent Response	51.3	60.9	64.8	71.2	46.5
Social Undesirability	50.3	67.7	47.0	66.0	59.7
Achiever Personality	50.6	43.0	76.9	76.8	66.7
Intellectual Quality	68.9	81.5	45.9	68.2	86.8
Creative Personality	46.5	86.6	31.2	51.2	69.1
Social Adjustment	44.5	33.5	32.7	18.6	37.8
Emotional Adjustment	41.4	32.5	38.4	24.4	45.2
Masculine Orientation	38.4	39.2	32.7	39.6	48.7
Business Interest	24.9	14.1	12.3	26.0	12.5
Humanities Interest	32.6	72.4	35.5	35.8	63.7
Social Science Interest	33.3	50.5	14.6	22.2	57.2

TABLE 1 (continued)

Variables	Underachievers		Overachievers		
	U1 (n=12)	U2[a] (n=11)	01 (n=10)	02 (n=7)	03[b] (n=7)
Physical Science Interest	56.5	41.5	62.5	73.2	43.8
Biological Science Interest	38.5	8.1	55.5	24.2	15.4
OPI					
Thinking Introversion	50.8	57.0	47.8	55.2	61.4
Theoretical Orientation	53.6	54.8	55.1	51.2	53.5
Aestheticism	44.8	61.9	42.8	54.6	59.8
Complexity	55.0	65.5	43.8	47.8	62.0
Autonomy	61.5	66.4	55.9	62.6	66.4
Religious Orientation	61.4	61.0	53.7	61.6	64.5
Social Extroversion	47.0	47.0	39.7	43.2	49.1
Impulse Expression	59.2	67.2	45.9	48.4	59.1
Personal Integration	51.7	50.0	53.7	56.4	54.8
Anxiety Level	50.9	47.5	51.2	53.8	53.4
Altruism	46.9	53.0	45.1	48.0	55.2
Practical Orientation	45.6	38.1	46.5	41.2	36.5
Masculinity-Femininity	55.4	45.0	57.9	53.2	49.2
Response Bias	47.9	46.8	54.7	51.8	50.2

[a] MAC II cluster computes significance tests based on the mean intercluster differences between each pair of clusters. Comparison of the overall value of U1 versus U2 produced a t of 8.86 significant at the .002 level, two-tailed for 19 df.

[b] t-tests were computed for the distance between the three overachieving clusters (see a): 01, 02: t = 5.67, 13df, p= .002, two-tailed; 01, 03: t = 12.73, 15 df, p = .002, two tailed; and 02, 03: t = 7.93, 10 df p = .002, two tailed.

The first underachieving cluster (hereafter, U1) contained 12 subjects who could be characterized as relatively practical, achievement-oriented, conservative, controlled, physical science-oriented, adjusted, non-intellectual, and traditional. The second containing 11 subjects, (U2) was relatively theoretical, liberal, impulsive, artistic, humanities-oriented, non-traditional, deviant, and verbal.

The overachievers paralleled the underachievers, although there were three groups of them. The first cluster (01), with 10 subjects, was relatively achievement oriented, controlled, conservative, and theoretical. The second (02), with five subjects, in between the other two on most variables though closer to 03 than 01, was characterized by higher scores on physical science and business interests. The third cluster, 03, with seven subjects, had scores indicating they were

relatively more verbal, theoretical, liberal, expressive, and impulsive than most other overachievers.

If one collapses the three overachieving groups into two (01's vs. 02's and 03's), then the scores on the cluster analyses suggest a relatively conservative, conforming high achievement-oriented, practical, science-oriented, and controlled group and a more liberal, deviant, theoretical, humanities-oriented, less achievement-oriented, and more impulsive group. This gives two groups to compare with the two groups of the underachievers. Absolute differences did appear between all underachievers and overachievers, but what is interesting is that knowledge of the absolute level of a trait such as impulsivity or extroversion is more meaningful when one knows the context of other personality variables. For instance, the U1's, the more conservative and less verbal group, who looked most like the 01's in their pattern of scores, had higher mean scores on the key traits of impulsivity and extroversion. Such scores were similar to those of the high achieving but more liberal, theoretical, and unorthodox 03's. However, what would be an acceptable amount of impulsivity in an aspiring artist could be indicative of serious control problems in a would-be scientist or engineer. If this analysis is apt, it suggests that some underachievement may arise from a mismatch of certain personality traits, using the average level of traits of successful students in a particular interest or vocational area as a frame of reference. Pohl and Pervin (1968) found that high grades for engineering students were associated with a more concrete style; but humanities and social science majors were better off i.e., had higher grades-with a more abstract style. In the present study the mismatch seemed to be between impulsivity, achievement motivation, and academic interests. Further research that explored the development of these conflicts would help in understanding these underachievers. One might also wonder about whether a mismatch of traits might not result in a sense of separation from other students in the same curriculum.

There is a question about the meaning of these subgroups: Are they psychologically valid and stable entities? The small sample size permitted no cross validation; but other data suggest that the clusters were more than artifacts. For instance, Kisch (1968), employed the same variables at the same university in a larger study which included a cluster analysis. Although comparisons are imprecise, the two underachieving clusters in the present investigation appear to be similar to two of Kisch's larger subgroups. However, replication and collection of other kinds of data are necessary to asses the stability of these subgroups.

The interview data, though not quantitatively analyzed in regard to subgroups, did give the impression of U1's and U2's living different lives at the university, with the most salient impression being that the U2's looked the more intellectual and involved in the University of the two groups. The U2's contained those students who talked explicity about "identity crises", displayed humanities interests, (painting, drama, etc.) and experimented with new experiences, including drugs. Indeed, some of these students looked as if they might be more comfortable in the College of Architecture and Design as opposed to a traditional liberal arts curriculum.

It seemed as if the students in this group were somewhat more conscious of themselves as being "underachievers" than the U1's. They knew they had high aptitudes (from their aptitude test scores) which they also knew were discrepant with their low grades. For some of the U2's, the idea that they were bright, and therefore special, seemed to be crucial to their self-concepts. They presented themselves as intelligent but only working at things that interested them. For instance, I asked one such student how he was able to turn out such a huge amount of work on certain occasions:

S: "Well . . . I usually don't want to, but I have to be stimulated to do any work.

I: What makes you stimulated?

S: Interesting discussions usually in class relating to the subject, to the things that are meaningful to me, or at least allowing me to relate it."

One wonders with such students if they are protecting themselves with a myth of "if only I tried, I could succeed." This student, and some other U2's, gave indications that being uninterested or unmotivated was a way of preventing the commitment to achievement that would be necessary for higher performance. Here the danger might be that they might commit themselves and nevertheless fail.

The U2's seem to be the most overtly hostile group and the one most likely to offer an ideological criticism of the University. However, none of these students ever attacked the system in an organized way or attempted to join a reform movement. Instead, many engaged in a great deal of verbal sniping at courses and teachers and the University in general. Some students were able to make their peace with the school by deciding that it was bad, but that it was possible for individuals to get some good things out of it, on their own.

One such student, after making this choice, was able to significantly improve his grades:

S: "You know, like I had pretty good thoughts about what college would be like from what I was actually experiencing. I thought it was going to be a real learning process, not mere crap.

I: So what has happened now, have you decided that it really is crap and are resigned to it, or . . .?

S: I had decided that it really is crap but you can find out - you can find good things in it and you can get by if you want to and get something out of it, even in spite of the system."

Others continued to rail against the system, often in self-defeating ways. Frequently cited was the concern for relevance which may have been part of this group's quest for identity. These students tended to like courses that focused on existential issues, religious philosophy, growth experiences such as T groups, and, in general, intellectual content that would be relevant to identity formation and their personal concerns. They reported seeking out and enjoying books, movies and plays that talked to their identity concerns:

S: "Well, one thing I really enjoyed was this book by Gore Vidal. It was called the Judgement of Paris, and it was about this young man who went to Europe, and he had just finished graduating from college and he really didn't know what he was going to do. I felt a certain amount of empathy for him because he really didn't, he had just graduated from law school, so he was a lawyer, but he didn't really know what he was going to do, and he described it as searching for the beast in the jungle, his search for what he is going to do, searching for the beast in the jungle that he could hear, but he hadn't found yet. And he talked about the time when he had been so lost that he didn't even know that the beast in the jungle existed which I thought was kind of interesting, or it kind of even gave me a feeling of hope because I am at the point where I don't know that the beast in the jungle exists. And here is someone else talking about the way I feel, to be at a point in front of me, and to be talking about the fact that they are almost at the point where they can hear, but they haven't found it yet makes me think that maybe there will be a point where I will find it someday. I rotate. I go back and forth between thinking that I will never find a purpose and that actually most adults are married and leading happy lives so maybe. . . ."

This kind of intellectual concern among the U2 students probably had contradictory effects on their teachers. Unlike the U1's, they seemed intellectually active - they read, they sought out new experience, etc. - but these students were probably quite frustrating, for they were mainly interested in personal relevance and usually refused to discipline themselves for subjects that had no immediate payoffs. It is interesting that while none of the U1's reported any closeness with the teaching faculty, several of the U2's did. In these cases, the teacher turned out to be a teaching fellow, who probably because of age and interest, had much in common with these students. This kind of instructor was also less likely to raise authority issues, an area in which these students were particularly sensitive. In one sense, this group was an alienated and angry one being disappointed with themselves and very annoyed at much of what they saw going on at the university. However, one also suspects that they received a lot of social support from like minded students and perhaps some teachers as well. They certainly were articulate and could find support from some of their criticisms of grades, requirements, etc. in the rhetoric of many of the student activists.

The U1's were in some ways the more alienated subgroup. These students gave off relatively little sense of intellectual ferment, of the experiencing of new

ideas, of trying out new roles and experiences. They often seemed to be in school for more practical reasons such as getting a job requiring a college degree.. Furthermore, many of them seemed more psychologically attached to home than to school. For instance, one student spent all his weekends at home, with his girlfriend, parents, and relatives. Another was actively involved in one of his parent's businesses while at school. Another coming from a rural area and feeling socially isolated, lived at the university with an older brother and had as his fondest wish the desire to be out hunting and fishing. The combination of this style and the conservative attitudes of the U1's, together with their poor academic performances, made them both an unhappy and apparently isolated group. They identified with many of their own parents attitudes toward education, they expected their teachers to be authorities and seemed more comfortable in highly structured classes, but these very values and interests often placed them out of step with many peers and teachers. Their poor grades did not allow them to build identities or anchor self-esteem around high achievement. For these students school was good when it was either practically oriented or not too hard:

I: "How have your classes been going?

S: Classes are O.K. . . . one or two of them I kind of enjoy. None of them are really bad yet or anything so it is not too much of a drag going to classes or anything. Even studying is not too bad.

I: What has been good about that?

S: Well, like Econ. is somewhat interesting. You learn what makes the world the way it is. It is practical stuff; it is not like if I were taking chemistry. I don't care about it, I have no interest in it; so accounting is not as interesting but it is somewhat practical and I go into business . . . and anthropology is O.K., it's like biology I had in high school so I am kind of interested in that. . ."

The concern with the practical and lower theoretical interests makes one wonder if several of these students might not have been happier in a more structured and applied curriculum such as engineering or business.

Implications and conclusions

The data presented above suggest the following conclusions: 1. Underachievers differ from overachievers in the area of impulse control and responsibility. 2. There appear to be differences between underachievers. 3. In some ways, all underachievers appear to be like certain dropouts. They too act as if they have given up on trying in the educational foot race. However, they manage to hang in. The U2's seemed similar to the description of the dropouts described in Samenow's (1968) study. Furthermore, both dropouts and underachievers seem to raise questions about values, principles, responsibility, and authority.

Given the underachiever's style, what suggestions could be given to potential helpers? There are some possibilities for intervention, but whoever is intervening needs to be clear about his own values in order to be comfortable in dealing with such students. Such persons also need to have enough of a relationship with the student over time so that they can get a sense of the pattern of his behavior. It is difficult to decide about what is going on when only privy to one incident. There is also the possibility that certain of the underachievers might have been helped by vocational counseling, especially if it turned out to be the case that their particular interests of style would be better off at a different kind of institution or in a different curriculum.

There were some instances in which teachers had great effects for both kinds of underachievers. One U1 seemed to have some very good experiences with an English teacher who allowed a lot of freedom and relevance but pushed for performance, reminiscent of Stern's (1962) reporting of the special class of authoritarian students. Some U2's seemed to experience growth from certain teachers who were willing to confront them while talking about personally relevant issues.

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